

*A Serious Enquiry into national and
personal Sins recommended.*

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED at

G O S P O R T,

FEBRUARY 4, 1740-1.

B E I N G

The Day appointed for a *Public Fast*, to humble ourselves before the Lord, to deprecate his Judgments, and to implore his Protection of this Land against its Enemies.

By *JOHN HURRION.*

Published at the Request of several of the
H E A R E R S

*Return to me, and I will return to you, saith the
Lord of hosts: But you said wherein shall we re-
turn? Malachi iii. 7.*

L O N D O N:

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T H E
P R E F A C E.

THIS plain discourse is presented to the public in compliance with the repeated desires of many Christians, whom I value, and whom I am called to serve in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I am very sensible, that nothing of mine can be free from various imperfections; but as many writings have been useful, which have not excelled, I hope, that this sermon, which was acceptable from the pulpit, may not be unuseful from the press; seeing the enquiries proposed, and the exhortations enforced, are seasonable and important.

There is an awful wo denounced against those watchmen, who neglect to give the people warning. So that if I have spoke with some freedom, it was because the case required it; and if any thing contained in the following pages may be
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The P R E F A C E.

blest by God, to awaken in the minds of men a serious thoughtfulness, and to promote faith and purity, I shall obtain my end, think my pains abundantly recompensed, and shall be entirely easy under any censure, that may be cast upon the performance.

J. HURRION.

*To reduce our Expenses, retrench our
Luxury, increase our Economy, & reform
our manners & heal our Divisions. shall
be ^{only} objects of our Concern.*

ZEPHANIAH

ZEPHANIAH II. 1, 2, 3.

*Gather your selves together, yea, gather your
selves, O nation not desired;*

*Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass,
as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord
come upon you, before the day of the Lords
anger come upon you.*

*Seek you the Lord, all you meek of the earth, which
have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness,
seek meekness: it may be you shall be hid
in the day of the Lords anger.*

THE voice of public authority on this day calls us to humble our selves before the Lord, to acknowledge and lament our personal and national sins, to deprecate those judgments, to which by our iniquities we have rendered our selves obnoxious, to beg the removal of those evils, which we already feel, and to implore the divine aid and protection, that we may be kept from falling a prey into the hands of our enemies.

The command, which for this purpose, we have received from his Majesty, is highly just, and reasonable, and ought with the greatest readiness to be complied with, as it fully answers,
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and may be said to be a kind of echo to the call of divine providence.

It is very evident, that the dispensations of providence are little regarded by us, and that the generality of persons are scarce at all concerned either to praise God for his mercies, or to deprecate the calamities, which they have reason to fear will fall upon them.

We have, for many years, been favoured with a constant uninterrupted succession of national blessings; What has been our behaviour in the enjoyment of them? What returns have we made to God for them? Surely, when we seriously reflect upon our unthankfulness and ingratitude, consider, how vilely we have abused, and grown wanton under the rich mercies bestowed upon us, we may justly fear, that unless we break off our sins by repentance, the forbearance of God will soon draw to a conclusion.

Every diligent serious observer of events cannot, but be sensible, that the most High seems in the present day to have a controversy with this land; the hand of his vengeance has for some time been lifted up, and nothing but amazing patience has hitherto suspended, and kept it from falling upon us with such a weight, as would have crushed us to pieces. We have already tasted of the effects of the divine resentment: the damage, which our shipping has received from violent storms, the uncommon severity of the late winter, and spring, the great scarcity of all sorts of provision, and the vast distress,

distress, which many thousand families have thereby been reduced to; these things attended with an expensive war, which, though absolutely necessary, must be highly prejudicial to our trade and commerce, the very life of this nation, are indeed very grievous judgments, and yet as grievous as they are, unless there be a national repentance, there is abundant reason to fear, that they are only the beginnings of sorrow and prelibations of still severer and more dreadful tokens of divine displeasure against us. Who can be unmoved, and unaffected, when they think of the most terrible inundations, which have laid waste and desolate large tracts of land in neighbouring countries? And tho' God has, in this respect, been more favourable to us; yet the dismal effects of inundation, which some parts of England have felt, should awaken in our minds a serious thoughtfulness, and excite us to prepare to meet the Lord in the way of his judgments.

When the Almighty is sending abroad his judgments, he calls men to repent of their wickedness, to amend their ways, and doings, and to return to him, from whom they have revolted *. This is the proper language of such providences; some are thereby taught righteousness, but others remain impenitent, obstinately persist in their rebellion, and whilst the supreme majesty of heaven and earth is shaking the rod of his vengeance over their heads, they seem to

* Isa. xxvi. 9.

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to bid him defiance. When this is the case with the generality of a nation, and people, they are ripening apace for destruction: The Lord indeed is gracious and merciful, patient and long-suffering, but then he is equally holy, just, and righteous, and we may be assured, that when all mercies are abused, when all threatnings are slighted, when all warnings are despised, and when all impending judgments are ridiculed, and laughed at, by a nation in general, the Lord of hosts will e'er long display his justice, and power in their destruction.

There is not the least room to suppose, that a true personal repentance is meritorious of the spiritual salvation of those, who are partakers of it; nor can it be justly imagined, that a national repentance does in any degree merit a national temporal salvation; however it is apparent from scripture, that God in his infinite wisdom and goodness has been pleased to fix a connection betwixt repentance and salvation, and that as the latter cannot be expected without the former, so, on the other hand, when persons obtain the former, repentance, they have just reason to hope for the latter, salvation. The whole tenor of the gospel shews, that whosoever is endowed with the grace of repentance, shall be exempted from everlasting misery, and there are not wanting in scripture examples, in which we find, that national judgments have been kept from falling on a people, upon their repenting and humbling themselves before the Lord; the case of Nineveh, related in the book of Jonah,

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is a most remarkable instance hereof. The Ninevites, at the preaching of Jonah, cried mightily to God, he took compassion upon them, and averted the judgment, which by the prophet had been denounced against them. The work of humiliation, which the Ninevites performed so successfully, we are now called to engage in; the Lord grant, that we may be enabled to perform it in the same acceptable manner, and with the like success. That through a divine blessing I may be instrumental to promote such a good design and work, I have made choice of the words of the prophet Zephaniah now read, as being in many respects suited the occasion of our present meeting.

It is generally agreed by interpreters, that the prophet Zephaniah lived, but a short time before the Babylonish captivity, he begins his prophecy with foretelling those awful terrible judgments, which were just ready to fall upon Judah and Jerusalem, and then with great earnestness calls this sinful people to a speedy repentance, that at length they might obtain favour in the sight of God. The greatest part of the first chapter is taken up in describing the general desolation, that was coming upon them for the gross iniquities which abounded in the land. The prophet representing the destruction of Jerusalem, by the Chaldeans, declares, that the Lord would consume all things from off the land*, that their goods should be spoiled, and

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* Chap. i. 2, 13, 17.

plundered, and that their blood should be poured out, as dust, and their flesh as dung. Whilst he is denouncing against them these fore judgments, he sets before them an account of those enormous crimes, which were the procuring cause of these desolations: Some of them are charged with the most abominable open idolatry: Among the inhabitants of Jerusalem there was a remnant of Baal, who worshipped the host of heaven upon the house tops; and others of them, who did not proceed so far, were guilty of gross corruption of worship, for at the same time they swore by the Lord, they also swore by Malcham*. Some are charged with Atheism: They did not seek the Lord, nor did they enquire for him: Those of the higher rank are charged with luxury, and pride in apparel; some with oppression, they filled their masters houses with violence and deceit†; and we find, that some of them blasphemously denied the providence of God, and excluded him from having any share in the government of the world. These are some of those heinous sins, which provoked the Lord to take vengeance upon them.

The prophet having set their sins in order before them, and having denounced the wrath of God against them, he begins the second chapter with a most affectionate call to repentance, that they might escape impending judgments, Gather your selves together, yea gather your

* Ver. 4, 5, 6, 8.

† Ver. 9, 12, 15, 16, 17.

THE PUBLIC FAST, *Feb. 4. 1740.* II
your selves, O nation not desired : Before the
decree bring forth, &c.

They were a people, who by their iniquities
had deserved the severest punishment, and yet
the Lord seemed loth to give them up entirely,
and therefore time after time he sent his prophets
to warn them of the approaching desolations.
When God deals thus tenderly with a people,
and they are not hereby brought to repentance,
they must become altogether inexcusable, and
his justice is eminently conspicuous in their ruin,
and destruction. The words of the text may
be divided into two branches ; we may ob-
serve,

A general call or exhortation to the Jewish
nation, and a particular address to the humble
and pious among them.

I. We may observe a general call or exhor-
tation to the Jewish nation : They are exhorted
to gather themselves together, yea to gather
themselves. In treating on this branch of the
text, I shall consider, the character of the peo-
ple to whom the call is given, and explain the
duty, which they are called to perform ; and take
notice of the motive, brought by the prophet,
to excite them to a speedy compliance with the
duty.

I. I shall consider the character given of the
people, to whom the call or exhortation is directed:
They bear the character of a nation not desired :

The word, in the * original, is by expositors understood in two different senses; some understand it in an active sense and render it 'not desiring;' others understand it in a passive sense, and follow our translation, 'not desired:' It being allowed, that the Hebrew word will admit of either of these senses, and they are not inconsistent, I can see no just reason, why both may not be included.

The Jewish nation were a people not desirous of their own good and welfare, they had no concern to obtain an interest in the divine favour; they were greatly polluted, and had no inclination to repentance and reformation, and this being their wretched state, they were a nation not desired, not amiable in the sight of God, they had nothing to recommend them to his esteem, and regard; but, on the other hand, their forgetfulness of God and gross violations of his law, exposed them to his vengeance. Whilst the Jewish nation walked in the commandments of the Lord their God, he delighted in them, and rejoiced over them to do them good; but when they revolted, and cast off their allegiance, they were cast out of the favour of God, and became a nation not desired by him.

This character is not to be confined to the rebellious Jews, it is applicable to all those political bodies of people, who apostatize from God, and abandon his service, and unless there be a speedy stop put to the growing wickedness of
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this land, the character may with the highest justice be applied to us. How small is the number among us, who have any real hearty desires after an interest in the divine favour? How few, comparatively, have any concern or thought about the enjoyment of the gracious presence of God? What a woful general declension from the ways of righteousness is visible in this nation? What little regard is paid to the duties of religion, and worship? And seeing such a dismal neglect of God and his service enters into our character, we may with great reason fear, that without repentance, we shall soon be cast off, as a people not desired by God: We have rendered ourselves odious in his sight by our rebellion and ingratitude, he has given us warning upon warning, and seems unwilling wholly to forsake us, we are still monuments of his sparing mercy. Oh! that in this our day we may be persuaded to mind the things which belong to our peace, and happiness.

2. I shall explain the nature of the duty, which the rebellious Jews are called to perform; Gather your selves together, yea gather your selves. The word in the * original, which is translated, 'gather,' not only signifies to meet and assemble together, but also to search, and to make a diligent enquiry, this interpretation is justified by the concurrent testimony of judicious expositors. Accordingly the Jews are here exhorted not only to meet together

ther in a solemn assembly, but also being so met to make a strict enquiry into themselves to know, what those sins were, which exposed them to the dreadful effects of the divine resentment.

(1.) In a season of public calamities, and when a people are threatened with desolating judgments, they are called to meet together with great solemnity. The Lord says by his prophet Joel *, " Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the people, and sanctify the congregation." Hence it is evident, that when calamities, either felt or feared, are of a general nature, it is not sufficient in God's account to humble ourselves before him in the closet ; but there should likewise be a public profession of repentance. None, who are capable of giving their attendance, should be absent from these solemn assemblies, but all should with the utmost readiness join in the public acts of humiliation, and in pleading with God, that national judgments may be averted, and present calamities may be removed. Private personal sins should be confessed and bewailed before God in private ; but public national sins, which the generality of a people are chargeable with, should be lamented and repented of by them met together in a body ; and that they may engage in this work with a suitable frame and disposition of spirit ;

(2.) It is necessary that they make a strict search, and a narrow enquiry into themselves.

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* Joel ii. 15.

When a people are called together upon these solemn occasions, they are called to enquire, what national sins have stirred up the Lord to be angry against them, and then every one should examine, wherein he has contributed to that common guilt, which has exposed the nation to divine vengeance.

[1.] They are called to search, and enquire, what national sins may have stirred up the Lord to be angry against them. The prophet in the former chapter had denounced heavy judgments against the Jews for their idolatry, oppressions, prophaneness, infidelity, and atheism, and in my text he exhorts them to search, whether the charge was well-grounded, and whether those things were so or not.

We are now called to make the like enquiry concerning our national sins, and that you may be the better enabled to perform the duty incumbent upon you, I shall propose to you several heads of enquiry relating to infidelity, superstition, and wilful ignorance, the neglect of public and private worship, prophaneness and impieties of all kinds.

I begin with the first head of enquiry relating to infidelity. We bear the name of a Christian nation, but was ever infidelity more prevailing, and rampant, in any land, that bore that character, than in this? What vile attempts have been made by some to disparage, and to set aside the whole of the Christian revelation? And how greedily have their blasphemous reflections
upon

upon the bible been sucked in by the rising generation? Whilst some have been making rude attacks upon the divine authority of the holy scriptures; what a multitude of readers, and admirers, have they found in almost every part of the land, when the advocates for Christianity have scarce been able to obtain an audience? Is it not apparent, that the generality of those, who would be thought to be of the politer sort, greatly value themselves upon their being able to ridicule, and banter the sacred writings? Is there not among us a considerable growing number, who prefer the writings of heathen authors, before the writings of the prophets and apostles? Is it not esteemed by many a kind of genteel qualification, and an high accomplishment, to be capable of turning that book into a jest, which has been confirmed by many incontestable miracles? Is it not the ambition of many in this part of the world, to distinguish themselves by casting an open contempt upon that sacred word, which came by divine inspiration? And are not these things a full evidence, that infidelity is rushing in upon us with a mighty torrent. But then besides these grosser infidels who reject and despise the whole of Christianity; is there not an increasing number among us, in this land, who whilst they profess to believe the bible to be the word of God, do nevertheless oppose and vilify some of the most important articles of the Christian faith? Such as are acquainted with the writings
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of the present age cannot but know, that the peculiar doctrines of the gospel are therein commonly rejected, and often treated with contempt. The proper Deity of our Redeemer, and Sanctifier is denied by some; the operations of the holy Spirit, as a Spirit of supplication and consolation are exploded by others, and such, as endeavour to plead for them are scornfully branded with enthusiasm: The doctrine of justification by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ; the freeness, sovereignty, and efficacy of divine grace, and the infinite value of the sacrifice offered by Christ, have met with the same contemptuous treatment. Whilst some have at once renounced the divine authority of the bible, others have been endeavouring to sap, and undermine it by rejecting those important truths, which lie at the foundation of Christianity; and surely this departure from the faith, once delivered to the saints, should be greatly lamented by us.

I pass on to another head of enquiry relating to superstition and wilful ignorance. Superstition is the off-spring of ignorance, and when persons wilfully continue in a state of ignorance with respect to the most important matters of religion, they are often given up by God to a judicial blindness of mind, which is productive of the grossest superstitions. The gospel in points absolutely necessary to salvation, is clear and plain, and yet how much are the generality of persons unacquainted even with

the very first principles of the Christian religion? They will not give themselves the trouble of reading the word of God, and therefore remain wholly strangers to those truths, which in the gospel are revealed with the greatest perspicuity. Conscience, unless it be quite asleep, will not suffer persons to be easy, without somewhat, which has at least the show of religion, and we commonly find, that they, who are most ignorant of the scriptures, are most zealous in performing acts of superstitious will-worship; and they, who are most unacquainted with the oracles of God, are most fond of observing the traditions of men. Shall we not upon a due enquiry find, that many parts of this land are over-run with superstitious, wilful ignorance, which is the bane of all true religion? If we look into the corners of the kingdom, we shall meet with too great evidence of this melancholy truth, where the people sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, and though they have or may have the bible in their hands, yet they will not converse with it, are exceeding loth to part with their old ignorance, and content themselves with the dull formal repetition of a few external observances.

It were to be wished, that this wilful ignorance was confined to the darker remote corners of the land, but if we pass hence to towns, and cities, and places of great resort, where persons may have larger opportunities
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for gaining knowledge, we shall there find, that wilful ignorance in religious matters has a powerful influence upon the minds of men; they seem desirous of continuing in darkness, and will not grant the light of the gospel an admission into their understandings. Their condition is very unhappy and miserable, who by their usurping tyrannical masters are denied the liberty of reading the word of God, and surely their guilt must be exceeding great, who may have free access to the holy scriptures, and yet obstinately refuse to converse with them, and persist in shutting their eyes against the light.

This leads me to another head of enquiry concerning the neglect of public and private worship. Whilst some through allowed ignorance are brought to take up, and to rest contented, with meer external observances, others, seem willing to cast off all appearance of religion, and multitudes are very much strangers to the worship of God both in public and private. The regard to public worship perhaps never ran lower, than it does at the present day. What little notice is generally taken of the sabbath? What little value do most shew of the ordinances of Christ? How few comparatively make conscience of attending upon the means of grace? What an abundance of contempt is by many poured upon gospel institutions? The royal Psalmist rejoiced, when they said unto him, Let us

go up into the house of the Lord*. But now when persons are called to wait upon God, they are ready to say, what a weariness it is: What a wretched coldness and lukewarmness, deadness and indifferency, are visible in the deportment of those, who at times make an appearance in the place of public worship; and what a vast number throughout the land scarce ever give an attendance there? When there was no open vision, the ordinances of Christ were precious; but since there is a full liberty of enjoying them, they are neglected and despised. Some are so wise and knowing, that they want no instruction; some are so great as to think themselves to be above all admonition, some are so good, as to have no occasion to be put in remembrance of their duty, and some are so attached and wedded to the world, that they can find no leisure to wait upon God in the ways of his own appointment. The neglect of public worship by some, and the contempt of it by others, is a growing evil which may justly pull down upon us the judgments of God. And may it not be added, that the neglect of family-worship is no less common among us? The prophet Jeremiah speaks of God's pouring out his wrath upon the heathen, and upon the families, that called upon his name†. Hence we may infer, that such as live without

* Psal. cxxii. 1. † Jer. x. 25.

out family worship are liable to have the indignation of the Lord fall upon them. If so, what a woful condition must that nation be in, which principally consists, and is made up of prayerless families, who never present their united requests and praises unto God? If a destroying angel should pass through this land, and mark all those houses for destruction, in which family-worship was not performed, what a general desolation must follow upon it; and how few, comparatively, would escape? It is certain, that there is a remnant among us, who call upon God, both in public and private, otherwise the Lord would long since have poured out his fury upon us, but there is too great reason to fear, that the number of praying families among all ranks, and even among external professors, is very small, and therefore without a repentance and reformation, it may be feared, that the day of the Lord's anger is not at a great distance off.

Another head of enquiry may have a respect to the prophaneness, and impieties, which abound in the land. These are so notorious, that they may be easily found without much search. It has been often said, that no nation is better furnished with good laws, than Great-Britain, and yet no nation more regardless of the laws in force, nor can we expect, that it should be otherwise, until they, who are entrusted with a power to punish offenders, are more active in the discharge of their duty

duty, and more ready to recommend the observation of those laws by their own obedience.

If we take a survey of those of an higher rank, shall we not find the greatest part of them giving a loose to their sinful inclinations, running into all manner of excesses, living in all kinds of debauchery, and glorying in their shame? If we take a view of the lower sort of people, shall we not find them for the most part copying after the examples of their superiors? What a deluge of impiety has overspread the land? What an open defiance is continually given to the laws of God, and man? How triumphantly do the workers of iniquity go on in their wicked courses, and instead of being ashamed of their prophaneness make a mock at sin. Wherever we cast our eye, whatever part of the land we look into, we behold wickedness abounding in some form and shape or other: The most shameful intemperance, the most blasphemous oaths, the vilest perjuries, the basest dishonesty, and the most abominable lewdness are vices, which greatly prevail in the nation. They are crying national sins, which call aloud for vengeance.

I am so far from exaggerating matters, that I have only given you a small sketch of those abominable impieties which have overflowed the land, and which threaten it with destruction. Surely upon a serious review of these national sins, we may take up the lamentation
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of Ifaiah over Judah and Jerufalem, * ‘ Ah! finful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a feed of evil doers, who have forfaken the Lord, and provoked the holy one of Ifrael to anger.’

[2.] Having confidered the fins of the nation in general, we must not ftop here, but it is the duty of every one to fearch, and enquire, wherein he has contributed to that common guilt, which has expofed the whole body to divine vengeance. It is too common for perfons to make heavy complaints of the wickednefs of the times, and of the land in which they live, and whilst they are thus complaining to be wholly regardless of their own perfonal guilt. Whilst they lament the degeneracy of the age, they are apt to think themfelves to be entirely innocent. We ought to be deeply affected with national crimes, but let us not be unmindful of our own tranfgreffions: The Lord by the prophet fharpely reprov'd the Jews for their impenitence, and for their not humbling themfelves on the account of their own particular perfonal fins, they might perhaps in the general acknowledge their nation to be a finful nation, but as they were ftrangers to felf-humiliation, the Lord tells them †, that no man repented him of his wickednefs, faying, what have I done?

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* Ifa. i. 4.

† Jer. viii. 6.

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It is unquestionably certain, that national sins ought to be lamented, and bewailed, but it can be of no advantage to you, to declaim against the iniquities of the times, unless you seriously consider your own sinfulness and guilt, and examine, wherein the times may be the worse for you.

As a nation is constituted of many individuals, the sins of every individual person in it make up the common national guilt, which has exposed the whole body to divine vengeance. Therefore when we are deprecating national judgments, it must be the duty of every individual person to bewail those sins, whereby he has been instrumental to increase the common national guilt. Here let every one lay his hand upon his heart, and seriously examine himself. It is certain, that all are not equally guilty, but perhaps upon enquiry, it will be found, that no one individual can wholly excuse himself; some of the crying sins which abound in the nation have been mentioned: examine, and see, which you are innocent of, and which you are chargeable with; perhaps you may not belong to the number of such, as are gross infidels, who reject the whole of the bible with contempt; but have you not renounced and despised some of the peculiar fundamental articles of the Christian faith; perhaps you have not been left to deny the divine authority of the holy scriptures, and have not allowed your selves
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to treat the sacred writings with grimace and banter; but have you not under-valued and slighted some of those doctrines, which are of the utmost weight and consequence to salvation? Perhaps you have not proceeded so far, as to turn the book of God into a jest, but have you not been very regardless of it, and suffered it to lie by in your houses as an useless, insignificant book? have you not contented your selves, with an almost total ignorance, of the method of salvation by Christ? have you not wilfully shut your eyes against the light of the gospel, and endeavoured to satisfy and quiet conscience by some external observances? Perhaps you cannot join with those, who ridicule the strict observation of the sabbath, and who with the most daring, barefaced impiety scoff at the ordinances of Jesus Christ; but does not conscience testify that instead of remembering, you have time after time forgot to keep holy the sabbath day? Have you not slighted public worship, and been as negligent about the means of grace, as if you did not believe them to be of divine appointment? When you should have been waiting upon the Lord in his temple, have you not prophaned his holy-day either by taking your pleasure abroad, or by indulging your ease at home? perhaps you cannot venture to despise that indignation, which the great God, has threatned to pour forth upon the families, which call not upon his

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name, but have you not rendered your selves obnoxious to his vengeance by a constant neglect of family-worship? Have you not suffered days, and months, and years, to pass without performing this duty, and has there in this respect been any difference betwixt your families, and the families of the heathen, who know not God? Perhaps you have been kept from a course of prophane swearing, but have you not been guilty of taking the name of God in vain? Perhaps you have not been permitted to belch out oaths against the God of heaven; but have you not blasphemed those sacred names of Jesus and Christ, by using them in a trifling manner? If any have been guilty of oppression, injustice, false ballances, lewdness, or any kind of impiety; if any have allowed themselves in criminal excesses, or any of the common vices of the day, let them abase themselves before the Lord, and as they have been instrumental to bring down national judgments by their sins, let all such endeavour to avert impending evils by a personal repentance and reformation, but there can be no such a personal repentance and reformation without a previous diligent self-examination.

3. I shall consider the motive brought by the prophet to enforce upon the Jews a speedy compliance with this duty.

They are exhorted to enter speedily upon the performance of it, because the time of their

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all ye must attend to this duty - be it

their desolation according to the threatening was not at a great distance off, and if they delayed searching and humbling themselves before God, such a delay might be attended with the most fatal consequences; they must do it soon, that they might do it, before the decree is brought forth, before the day passed as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord came upon them, before the day of the Lord's anger came upon them: the manner of expression used by the prophet in this, and the former verse is very emphatical, and striking, and plainly shews, that at the same time, he was obliged to denounce the vengeance of God against them, he had a most earnest desire to promote their salvation. In the former verse, where he calls them to assemble and to make a diligent search, he does with much vehemency repeat the summons. Gather yourselves together, yea gather yourselves: In the second verse he gives a moving representation of approaching judgments, and speaks of them in a variety of words, which were adapted to impress their minds with an awful sense of the dreadfulneſs of that desolation, which was ready to fall upon them. The prophet represents the execution of the sentence denounced against them to be the bringing forth the decree; describing the terrible nature of the punishment to be inflicted, he calls it the fierce anger of the Lord, and that he might, if possible, startle

them out of their security, he sets forth the season, or time, in which they were to be destroyed, as a day, which would pass as the chaff, and as the day of the Lord's anger.

(1.) He represents the execution of the sentence, to be the bringing forth the decree. The most high God had for a long time been sending his servants to give them warning of their approaching misery, they had vilely abused his patience, and unless they repented, he was determined in a short time to serve an execution upon them. The infinitely perfect God, is an immutable Being, and all his determinations shall certainly be accomplished: there are various changes in the dispensations of his providence, but there is no change in his purpose. When God sent his prophets to denounce judgments against any nation, or people, it was always supposed, that the sentence should be put in execution, unless they repented, but then as we cannot imagine God to be uncertain, whether they would repent, or no, it is evident, that in case a threatened people did repent, and thereupon judgments denounced were averted, there was no alteration in the divine purpose; because God had determined to give them repentance, and to render the threatnings denounced against them to be an effectual means to bring them to it. If a people slight all warnings, and despise all threatnings, and are thereupon destroyed; their

their continuing in a state of impenitence, and consequently their destruction necessarily connected therewith were fore-known by God: on the other hand, if any nation warned, and threatned with heavy judgments, does repent and reform, and hereupon is preserved and exempted from the calamities denounced, their repentance and reformation were likewise fore-known by God, and therefore their preservation from evils threatned, is so far from contradicting, that it is really a fulfilling of his original unalterable design. When God bestows salvation upon a repenting people, he therein acts according to his immutable purpose, which was, through the instrumentality of threatnings to bring them to repentance, and so to save them from impending judgments. The purpose of God declared by the prophet concerning the destruction of the Jews by the Chaldeans, had been a long time pregnant, and was now ready to bring forth. Therefore the prophet, with great earnestness, urges them to repentance; but it appears from the issue, that the main body of the people paid no regard to divine threatnings, they remained as hard, and impenitent, as ever, and therefore at the time appointed, the decree actually brought forth, and the judgments denounced, were executed upon them.

(2.) The prophet sets forth the terrible nature of the punishment to be inflicted, by calling it the fierce anger of the Lord. The
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misery of the impenitent Jews was not only to proceed from men, from fellow-mortals, but from the supreme Majesty himself, whose power is infinite, and before whom all creatures are as nothing, yea less than nothing, and vanity itself, says the prophet Moses. ‘ * Who knows the power of thine anger, O Lord, according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.’ The punishment denounced against the impenitent Jews, was to be inflicted upon them by the Almighty as their incensed enemy, and avenger ; and when the decree brought forth, they were to have not barely the anger, but even the fierceness of his anger come upon them, and what words can be more full of terror, surely if they had not had rocky, adamantine hearts, they could not have been unaffected with them. The anger of the Lord had been long kindled against them, and upon the bringing forth of the decree, it was to fall upon them with a vengeance, they were then to have judgment without mercy, and pure wrath without mixture.

(3.) The time and season, in which their destruction was to be accomplished is represented, as being a day, which passes as the chaff, and is said to be the day of the Lord’s anger. When the dreadful sentence was put in execution, then the day was to pass as the chaff, when once their destruction began, it was soon to be compleated,
and

* Psal. xc. 11.

and as the light chaff is suddenly, and with great impetuosity, driven before the wind, so these rebellious Jews being empty of all good, were, upon the day of their visitation, to be hurried into captivity. The day, in which the desolating judgments denounced were to fall upon them, is called, the day of the Lord's anger, to signify, that it was the day, in which God would display the glory of his avenging justice, and the exceeding greatness of his power in the destruction of his unrelenting implacable enemies.

Should it be said, what concern have we with the judgments and desolations, which befel the Jewish nation? I answer, the historical account in scripture of their provocations and judgments, is recorded for our admonition and warning: the nation of the Jews was highly favoured of God, and so is ours; it was a nation distinguished from other parts of the world, by the many spiritual privileges granted to them, and so is ours; it was a nation remarkably infamous for its infidelity and prophaneness, ingratitude, and rebellion, and so is ours. Seeing then there is such a great resemblance betwixt them, and us, both with respect to our mercies and our provocations, have we not just reason to fear, that without a timely repentance, we shall feel the like terrible effects of God's fiery indignation? Great-Britain has been long the darling of a kind indulgent providence;
our

our destruction has sometimes seemed inevitable, God has often appeared in a miraculous way for our defence and protection; but if we persist in our prophaneness, and in our abuse of gospel light, we may be assured, that the day of the Lord's fierce anger will come upon us, and there shall be none to deliver.

II. I should now proceed to the second branch of the text, which contains the address of the prophet to the serious, humble, and pious, that were to be found in this rebellious nation, 'Seek the Lord all ye meek of the earth, or of the land, which have wrought his judgment, seek righteousness, seek meekness, it may be, ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.' Having so largely insisted on the first verse, I must be brief in the consideration of this. In this address we may take notice of the duties exhorted to, and of an encouraging motive to a vigorous performance of them.

1. We may take notice of the duties, which the meek of the land are exhorted to engage in.

The nation in general, was a nation not desired, exceedingly corrupt, and polluted, but (as bad as it was) there was a remnant among them, that had wrought judgment, that were pious, meek, and serious, and who had by divine grace kept themselves from being infected

fectured with the abominable wickedness, which had overspread the land; the far greater part of them were hardened in their impieties, and the prophet had little room to think, that his applications to them would be attended with any success, and therefore leaving them, he addresses himself to the happy few, who were of another, and better spirit. It appears from the character, which they bear, that they were not of that unyielding spirit, which the majority of the nation were remarkable for, and the exhortation being directed to them, shews, that altho' they were endowed with many good qualities, yet they ought not to imagine, that they had attained to perfection, but should endeavour to grow and improve in the exercise of grace, and in the practice of new obedience.

(1.) They are exhorted to seek the Lord, or to seek his favour, and an interest in his gracious protection.

When the carnal Jews were in trouble, and in danger from their enemies, they went down into Egypt, stayed on horses, and trusted in chariots, because they were many, and strong, and at the same time they forgot to look and seek to the Lord, the holy one of Israel * ; but true believers esteem it both their duty, and interest, to take God for their portion, and to make him their refuge. 'The Lord

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* Isa. xxxi. 1.

is good to them, who seek, and look for him *.' The royal Psalmist crieth out with an holy wonder and admiration †, 'How great is thy goodness, which thou hast wrought out for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men.' As it was the practice of David, so it is, and should be, the practice of all good men, in time of trouble to seek to God as their high fortress, and the rock of their salvation. If you take God for your portion and refuge, you will be prepared for the most shocking events of providence. Seek the Lord in a way of faith, trust, and dependance, and then you shall be safe in the midst of the most terrible convulsions of states and kingdoms. Harken to the advice of the prophet Isaiah ‡, 'Trust in the Lord for ever, for with the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength.' He is the rock of ages, and if you rely upon him you shall not be disappointed §; the good man is not afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord. When national affairs have a dark aspect, and the Lord hides his face from the house of Jacob, then wait on the Lord, and look for him in the way of his judgments ||. We are in an especial manner required to seek the Lord in a way of prayer and supplication, whilst we are trusting in God, we must pour out our hearts

* Lam. iii. 14.

§ Psal. cxii. 7.

† Psal. xxxi. 19.

|| Isa. viii. 17.

‡ Isa. xxvi. 4.

hearts before him *. If we call upon him in the day of trouble, he will return an answer of peace †. God has riches of mercy in store for his people, however he will be enquired after for these things, and he will be found of those, who seek him with the whole heart ‡.

(2.) The meek of the land are exhorted to to seek righteousness; the term righteousness in this text is by some understood of the righteousness of justification, and by others, of the righteousness of sanctification, I can see no reason, why both may not be included. If we seek, and obtain a clear, full evidence of our having an interest in the justifying righteousness of Christ we shall find him to be a covert from the tempest, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land §. If we know assuredly that Jesus Christ is the Lord our righteousness, we may hence derive an abundance of support, and comfort in a season of the most grievous temporal calamities. It is also needful to seek the righteousness of sanctification; when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth, and seem ready to take hold on us, we are thereby called to learn righteousness, and the greater progress we make in the ways of holiness and new obedience, the better prepared we shall be for the most afflictive dispensations of providence. Let such, as profess themselves to be the servants of

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God

* Psal. lxii. 8.

† Psal. xci. 15.

‡ Jer. xxix. 15.

§ Isa. xxxi.

God be exhorted to abound in, and to be zealous of good works. Rest not contented with those measures of purity, which you have attained to, but endeavour to grow in holiness, be more diligent in watching over your own corrupt hearts, more circumspect in your walk, more spiritual in your conversation, more strict in the observation of the sabbath, more constant in the private and secret duties of religion, more frequent and serious in conversing with the holy scriptures, more careful to abstain from all appearance of evil, and more exemplary in the whole of your deportment. Whilst you are thus seeking righteousness, you may hope, that the Lord will be a God nigh to you, and fit you for the darkest events of providence.

(3.) They are exhorted to seek meekness. This frame and disposition of spirit is always highly useful and necessary, but never more so, than in a day of trouble, as it tends to reconcile us to the whole providential will of God. Therefore when the judgments of God seem to be nigh falling upon the land, in which you dwell, let such of you as have in some measure obtained a spirit of meekness, endeavour to grow in this grace; the more you are endowed with a meek spirit, the less inclined you will be to repine and murmur at the correcting hand of God, and the more patiently you will bear the indignation

nation of the Lord *: The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works; when he punishes a nation in general, or when he causes his judgments to fall upon particular persons, he does punish them far less, than their iniquities deserve, and to those, who are endowed with a spirit of meekness, this is a silencing consideration. Such as are destitute of this spirit, are ever quarrelling with God in a day of trouble, as if he were unrighteous in taking vengeance, but the more any persons are partakers of a meek and humble spirit, the more resigned they are to the will of God, and the more ready to submit to all the dispensations of his providence.

2. I shall take some notice of the encouraging motive to excite serious humble believers to a vigorous performance of these duties. 'It may be, you shall be hid in the day the Lord's anger.' In a day of general calamity the faithful servants of God have indeed no absolute promise, upon which they can build a certain expectation of a temporal preservation; however, the most likely way to have an interest in God's gracious protection is to be diligent and constant in his service. The promises relating to the eternal state of believers are certain and absolute, there can be no room to question their being for ever happy in a future state, for the mercy, truth, power, and

* Lam. iii. 39.

and all the perfections of God are engaged to secure their eternal happiness; it is uncertain indeed, what their lot may be in common calamities, but they have reason to hope, that their God will find an hiding place for them. The possibility hereof should encourage them to keep on in the exercise of every grace, and in the practice of every gospel duty, committing themselves to the providential care of God, and entrusting all their concerns, with him, who in sending national judgments has sometimes been pleased to manifest a particular regard unto his faithful people. But whatever uncertainties believers may be put to, with respect to temporal favours, they may be fully assured of this, that all events shall at last issue in their eternal good; and howsoever God may see fit to deal with them with regard to temporal deliverances, they may depend upon their being saved in that great terrible day of the Lord, when all the nations of the world shall stand before him.

Thus I have endeavoured to explain and improve the several branches of the text, I have discoursed on them for the most part in a practical way, and in a way adapted to answer the design of our present meeting. The whole nation is on this day gathered together in obedience to the just command of our Sovereign; our national sins are exceedingly heinous, and therefore our danger is exceeding great; but
if

if with broken hearts we confess our sins, and turn from our evil ways, who knows, but God may turn from his fierce anger that we perish not.

The CONCLUSION.

In my entrance upon the discourse I observed, that we have already tasted of the the judgments of God in the late uncommonly severe season, which occasioned such a scarcity of provision, as brought thousands of families into the utmost distress, the war depending is indeed highly necessary, but it must be looked upon as a national calamity, as it obstructs our trade and commerce. We may be ready to promise ourselves certain victory over our enemies, but God may chastise us for our presumptuous confidence, and other sins, by suffering us to fall into their hands. The ancient Jews were a potent people, but when they rebelled against God, they were spoiled, and trodden down by the king of Assyria the rod of his anger.

Let us search and try our selves, and let us return to the Lord from whom we have revolted; when we consider seriously the growth of infidelity, prophaneness, and impiety, among us in this land, what vile contempt is cast upon the holy scriptures, how much the sabbath is prophaned, how much the ordinances of Christ are despised, how much

40 A SERMON PREACHED ON

much family-worship is neglected, and laid aside; let us be covered with shame and confusion, and with great earnestness beg of God to turn us from our sins, that we may escape the judgments which we have deserved.

Let us not content ourselves with a bare general acknowledgment of the sins of the day, and nation; but let every one consider, how much he has contributed to the common guilt, and humble himself before God on account of his own personal sins, wherein he has been instrumental to pull down the wrath of God upon the land.

There can be no room to expect a national deliverance, unless there be national repentance and reformation; nor can there be a national repentance, unless individuals are persuaded to think on their ways, and to turn unto the Lord. When God by the prophet invited the rebellious Jews to return unto him, they replied with great perverseness and obstinacy, 'Wherein shall we return*.' Their hearts were hardened in their impieties, they refused to own their guilt, and pretended, that there was no occasion to exhort them to return. We have forfeited the divine protection by our sinfulness and ingratitude: our abuse of gospel light, our horrid profanation of sacred things, our heinous impieties, our oaths and blasphemies, licentiousness and immoralities, testify against this land, and nothing but

* Mal. iii. 5.

but infinite patience has hitherto suspended the stroke of divine vengeance. All Europe seems now to be in a commotion. It is unknown to us, what is in the womb of providence, but we have great reason to fear, that without a speedy repentance the most High will e'er long make this nation a monument of his vindictive justice.

Perhaps you may be ready to imagine, that the nation, with whom we are immediately contending, is so inferior to us in naval power, that we are in no danger of being overcome. Supposing, we are in this respect vastly superior to them, yet let me tell you, that when God has a controversy with a land, and has determined the destruction of it, he can never want instruments to accomplish his design, and the weakest shall be capable of doing it, when they receive a commission from him. Therefore instead of glorying in our own strength, let us humble our selves before the Lord, that our iniquities may not prove our ruin, and let us cry mightily to God to give us a victory over them, who endeavour to compass our ruin and destruction.

Go, and see, what an angry God has done to other nations, and consider what terrible judgments and devastations have befallen other countries for the sins of those, that have dwelt therein. The wisest councils, the most politic schemes, the most courageous officers,

the most powerful fleet, are not able to protect a people, when the Lord of hosts is departed from them. National sins unpented of are the very worst, and most dangerous of all enemies, and will certainly in the issue reduce the most flourishing kingdom into utter ruin. Let us then return to the Lord, and he will return to us, fight our battles for us, and be a wall of protection round about us.

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